AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-5. (Canceled)

6. (Currently amended) A process as claimed in claim 14, wherein the ionic liquid which is recovered from the work-up stage is recirculated to the column.

7. (Previously presented) A process as claimed in claim 6, wherein the ionic liquid is recirculated in an enrichment section of the column.

8. (Previously presented) A process according to claim 6, wherein the ionic liquid is recirculated onto one of three uppermost plates in the column.

9. (Previously presented) A process according to claim 6, wherein the ionic liquid is recirculated onto an uppermost plate in the column.

10. (Currently amended) A process for separating azeotropic or close-boiling mixtures by subjecting the mixtures to extractive rectification in which ionic salts which are liquid at temperatures below 200^0C ~~liquid is~~ are used as entrainer, wherein a high-boiling bottom product is taken off from a column in vapor form via a side offtake, wherein the side offtake is positioned in a stripping section of the column which has a plurality of plates including three bottommost plates, ~~and wherein the side offtake is positioned in the region of the bottommost three plates,~~ and wherein the side offtake is positioned directly at a bottommost plate in the column.

11. (Currently amended) A process for separating azeotropic or close-boiling mixtures by subjecting the mixtures to extractive rectification in which ionic salts which are liquid at temperatures below 200^0C ~~liquid is~~ are used as entrainer, wherein a high-boiling bottom product is taken off from a column in vapor form via a side offtake, wherein a bottom stream which has

been depleted in high boilers is recirculated to the column, and wherein the ~~ionic liquid~~ bottom stream is recirculated in an enrichment section of the column.

12. (Currently amended) A process for separating azeotropic or close-boiling mixtures by subjecting the mixtures to extractive rectification in which ionic salts which are liquid at temperatures below 200^0C ~~liquid is~~ are used as entrainer, wherein a high-boiling bottom product is taken off from a column in vapor form via a side offtake, wherein a bottom stream which has been depleted in high boilers is recirculated to the column, and wherein the ~~ionic liquid~~ bottom stream is recirculated onto one of three uppermost plates in the column.

13. (Currently amended) A process for separating azeotropic or close-boiling mixtures by subjecting the mixtures to extractive rectification in which ionic salts which are liquid at temperatures below 200^0C ~~liquid is~~ are used as entrainer, wherein a high-boiling bottom product is taken off from a column in vapor form via a side offtake, wherein a bottom stream which has been depleted in high boilers is recirculated to the column, and wherein the ~~ionic liquid~~ bottom stream is recirculated onto an uppermost plate in the column.

14. (Currently amended) A process for separating azeotropic or close-boiling mixtures by subjecting the mixtures to extractive rectification in which ionic salts which are liquid at temperatures below 200^0C ~~liquid is~~ are used as entrainer, wherein a high-boiling bottom product is taken off from a column in vapor form via a side offtake, wherein the bottom stream from the column is passed to a work-up stage in which the ionic liquid present is submitted to vaporization in order for separation of high-boilers still present.

15. (Currently amended) A process for separating azeotropic or close-boiling mixtures by subjecting the mixtures to extractive rectification in which ionic salts which are liquid at

temperatures below 200^{0}C ~~liquid is~~ are used as entrainer, wherein a high-boiling bottom product is taken off from a column in vapor form via a side offtake, wherein the bottom stream from the column is passed to a work-up stage in which the ionic liquid present is submitted to stripping in order for separation of high-boilers present.

16. (Currently amended) A process as claimed in claim 15, wherein the ionic liquid which is recovered from the work-up stage is recirculated to the column.

17. (Previously presented) A process as claimed in claim 16, wherein the ionic liquid is recirculated in an enrichment section of the column.

18. (Previously presented) A process as claimed in claim 16, wherein the ionic liquid is recirculated onto one of three uppermost plates in the column.

19. (Previously presented) A process according to claim 16, wherein the ionic liquid is recirculated onto an uppermost plate in the column.